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ABSTRACT

In 1989, community access television emerged in Cleveland (Ohio) with the establishment of a non-profit corporation, the Cleveland Community Access Corporation (CCAC), providing five community access channels. Cuyahoga Community College (CCC) was closely associated with the project from the beginning, contributing significant technical, administrative, and staff support to the CCAC. The college now administers one of the access channels. CCC's primary target audience has been defined as the 75,000 homes in Cleveland with access to cable service. Other target audiences include community centers, schools, institutions, and businesses which have access to cable, as well as organizations with whom there may be direct interactivity or data exchange via institutional cable "loops." Broadcasts began in September 1989, with approximately 100 hours of programs per week, providing credit instruction, employment training/information, community service programs and college-related information. One week after cablecasting was initiated, the first live program aired, and since then programming has expanded to include occupational information, college basketball, and live credit courses. Due to the high cost of keeping a channel on the air and the inability to sacrifice air time to advertisers, CCC has had to choose its programing carefully. In addition, a firm institutional commitment in terms of both resources and philosophy has been indispensable. Despite the high costs and low potential for generating revenues, cablecasting has proven valuable to CCC by considerably improving distance education initiatives and providing another forum for promoting the college and its programs. (MAB)

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PRESENTATION: LEAGUE FOR INNOVATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE, 1992

# CONNECTIONS FOR COMMUNITY EDUCATION THROUGH ACCESS CABLE TELEVISION

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In 1989, Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) seized upon an opportunity. Cable television had come to the City of Cleveland, and the College secured an educational access channel on the cable system.

## BACKGROUND

The emergence of Community Access Television in Cleveland was a direct result of the franchise agreement between North Coast Cable, Limited, the cable television provider, and the City of Cleveland. The agreement provided for five Community Access channels which would come under the control of a non-profit corporation. That corporation, which eventually was incorporated as the Cleveland Community Access Corporation (CCAC), was initially comprised of seven incorporators appointed by Cleveland's Mayor and City Council in the spring of 1988. One of those seven was the President of Cuyahoga Community College, who subsequently became the first president of the CCAC Board of Trustees. Of the five channels under CCAC jurisdiction, three were designated for educational programming (Channel 50 - elementary and secondary education; Channel 51 - community college, employment and training, and community service; and Channel 52 - college and university), and two for public group and individual access (Channels 53 and 54).

Tri-C was closely associated with Access Television from the beginning, and contributed significant technical, administrative, and staff support to the CCAC, including reassigment of one of its administrators on a part-time basis to serve as the Executive Director of the CCAC. We moved to address two big questions: Who do we want to reach (audience), and what do we want to reach them with (programming)?

## THE AUDIENCE

Tri-C is comprised of three campuses roughly positioned in a triangle, each leg of which is approximately 10 miles long. Driving time between campuses is approximately half an hour. Each campus is located in the service area of a different cable company. The College's Metropolitan Campus is located within the City of Cleveland, which is served by North Coast Cable, Limited. Presently, cable service is available in approximately 75,000 homes in the City. People in those residences are most likely to attend Tri-C at its Metropolitan or Eastern Campuses. These residents are our primary, and largest, target audience for cable programming.

Although it is most likely for us to think of individuals in their homes as the primary target audience for cable programming, a cable system may be capable of reaching other audiences and locations. In Cleveland, there are community centers, schools, institutions, and businesses that either have, or could have, cable access. The audience in these locations, which may or may not be the same as that found in the home, provides an opportunity for even more precise program targeting, and is one which we have yet to fully explore and investigate.

A third level of audience for consideration are those with whom there may be direct interactivity over any "institutional" or "B-Loop" cable services. At this level, there may be possibilities for both video and data exchange. This becomes an even narrower and more specialized audience and involves lesser known capabilities of a cable system. Depending upon how the system is built, there may be some real opportunities for program linkage and sharing. We are presently discussing the use of this "loop" with Cleveland State University.

## THE PROGRAMS

Having been involved in some of the initial planning for cable television in Cleveland, Tri-C had the advantage of prior thinking about what Community Access Television might mean, and how it might utilize the opportunity. Both then and now, we have viewed Community Access Television as a vehicle for reaching out into the community with credit instruction, employment training and information, community service programming and college-related information and programs.

Tri-C began cablecasting on Channel 51 in September, 1989, with approximately 100 hours of cablecasting per week. Our first program schedule was comprised primarily of pre-recorded programming, focusing on telecourses. Another staple was, and continues to be, the Cleveland City Club Forum and the Mayor's Educational Forum, which take place in community locations. The College tapes and edits both programs weekly, and provides them to area cablecasters and the local PBS Affiliate for airing. To that program base have been added the Kentucky GED series and selected satellite-fed programs of general interest. Occasionally, pre-recorded "specials," including the College's Commencement, have been cablecast.

Our first live program was the 1989 Fall Convocation, which took place about a week after we first began cablecasting. It featured several College and guest speakers, faculty award ceremonies, and interviews with College administrators. Regular live programming began with "Conversations," a weekly program focusing on College activities, events, or notable programs.

This was followed by "Work Spirit," which centered on topics relevant to the workplace. The next live series, "Career Moves," examined opportunities in careers for which Tri-C provides education and training. The College also regularly cablecasts College basketball and other sporting events, thus contributing to growing support for the athletic program.

The College also occasionally presents other special programs via television, including teleconferences downlinked from satellite, in-studio programs, and programs produced primarily for telecast by satellite to national audiences.

In the fall of 1992, the College began a new venture as it cablecast its first, live, credit course, "College Survival Skills." Students can attend the class in-person on campus, or at home. Those attending at home are linked to their fellow students in the class by telephone and the televised class session..

At Tri-C, we use a mix of pre-recorded and live programming which comes from both local and non-local sources. This was our intent from the beginning. Outside of audience appeal and content relevance, there are several factors that contribute to this mix. For pre-recorded programs from other sources, these include, cost, availability, and technical quality. Pre-recorded programming may be obtained from many sources, often at little or no cost. From our satellite dishes, we find a wealth of programs available to be downlinked, recorded, and replayed on a delayed basis. (One such program source is the Community College Satellite Network which provides satellite-fed programs each month which college's can record for delayed playback over cable. Tri-C serves as the uplink site for that monthly service.) For live programs coming from other sources, such as direct feed from satellite, the cost and availability of technical support also must be added.

This capability is added to our significant production facilities, staff, and equipment, to produce programming , and cablecast live or on a delayed basis. These local productions may be done for others on a fee-for-service basis. For the live or pre-recorded programs which we produce, the availability and cost of production crews, production and editing, equipment, and facilities have to be considered.

The final mix also will be heavily influenced by the available resource configuration. Using programming from external sources puts a heavier burden on support staff, while production done by your college (live or taped for delayed use) has a heavier impact on your production resources. The cable mix also must then be balanced against the mix of services required to support other instructional and institutional priorities. However, regardless of how resources and services are configured, the bottom line is still relevancy for your target audience.

The College continually seeks new programming ideas, both pre-recorded, or those which it can produce itself. As new programming is found, room is made in the schedule by reducing program repeats.

## THE VALUE OF ACCESS TELEVISION

The primary value of Tri-C's cablecasting efforts is the potential to impact distance education initiatives. Delivery of education to distant learners has been a beneficial alternative for students whose family,

personal, or work obligations prevent them from pursuing courses on campus. In delivering courses via cable, and other distance delivery methods, we closely monitor our efforts to ensure that the delivery system does not compromise the educational quality and value of the instruction. In that evaluative process, we rely heavily upon our faculty, who are intimately involved in every course in our distance education inventory.

A secondary value of cablecasting has been the opportunity to promote the College and its programs, introduce aspects of college life to the community, and establish a direct, positive relationship with our current and potential students. We are constantly conscious of the need to maintain technical and program quality representative of the College. Our access cable programming may be the only contact an individual has with us, or it may spark an individual's desire to begin or continue his/her education at Tri-C.

## REALITY

In reality, we also had to recognize, up front, that we were competing with every other channel on the cable spectrum. We did not try to promote ourselves as something we were not. We had to be uniquely Tri-C. Hence, our logo which identifies us as "Smart TV." We do not try to appeal to the masses. Instead, we aim our programs to that group who sees education as "the educational piece of the puzzle" of their lives, or who has an interest in Tri-C.

## EXPENSES? - YOU BET!

Keeping a TV channel, even an "access" channel, going is expensive. Simply keeping the channel on the air for 100 hours per week, 52 weeks per year, requires a considerable investment in technical staffing. In addition, there is the cost of the equipment and its maintenance, repair, and eventual replacement. Finally, on top of that, there is the cost of programming. Program schedules have to be developed, printed and distributed; staff have to be hired, evaluated, trained, and given direction; logs have to be kept; and phones and mail answered. New programming has to be obtained or developed. New graphics are required, or a new or modified "look" for the channel may be needed. In short, someone has to be in charge to either do it or make sure it all gets done. Supporting a full schedule of quality television programming is not an "add-on" to a staff member's already-over-committed time, but a primary responsibility that must be assumed by a qualified person.

The cost of programming will vary, but it can be significant. Generally, the larger your percentage of programming you produce yourself, the higher the cost for a good stock of pre-recorded programs, production facilities, equipment, and staff.

For pre-recorded programs, there is the assessment of how many of them are suitable for television (format, content, relevance, currency) and how long a series they will support, even with reruns. With live or locally produced programs, for each hour spent on cable production is an hour that

can not be spent on other productions (unless the production will serve multiple purposes). Total production capacity (both current and projected) must be against current and future needs for cable and other types of production. Those entering the cable access arena must be prepared to make some choices!

## INCOME? - DON'T COUNT ON A LOT

There is not much expectation of revenue from Access Television efforts. Advertising cannot be accepted to raise significant income by doing production on a contract basis for external groups will eat into the time to meet your own needs. The bottom line is that there must be institutional commitment (both in fiscal resources and philosophy) in order to be successful.

As of the first of the year, the channel programmed by Tri-C is the only one of the five Access Channels being programmed on a regular basis. Funding for Access Television was not provided in the initial franchise agreement between North Coast Cable Limited and the City of Cleveland. Recently CCAC has been able to negotiate funding support and provide added support to the College commitment of fiscal resources and philosophical support and belief in Access Television as an integral part of our distance education effort.

## THE FUTURE

As we look down the road a bit, some things appear quite certain, others less so. With certainty, our emphasis will be on instruction, and we will continue to build our offering of live credit instruction. We also will continue to produce live sports and occasional "specials." We will continually search for new community interest programming, either locally-produced or provided by producers from around the nation. Although we would prefer to have programming as locally relevant as possible, our mix of live and locally produced programming vs. that produced by others will be greatly influenced by the resources we have to invest in the locally produced programming. We will look to ways to reduce the cost of providing programs for Access Television, but not to the point of compromising program, relevancy, or technical standards.

With funding secured, CCAC is making plans to activate its other channels within the next several months. Tri-C is being considered by the CCAC as the manager and operator of the total Access Distribution system, which will play back programming over all access channels. This service would be provided under contract between Tri-C and the CCAC, with service emanating from Tri-C's Master Control facilities in downtown Cleveland.

The College's experience with Access Television has been very positive. We do not yet feel we have explored the full potential of this medium, but will continue to seek out opportunities to use this medium to take our College to the people.